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4TH DISTRICT, OREGON

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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

April 14, 2000

PLEASE RESPOND TO:

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The Honorable Dan Glickman
Secretary
Department of Agriculture
14th Street and Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

The Honorable Bruce Babbitt
Secretary
Department of Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Babbitt and Secretary Glickman,

The Northwest forest plan grew out of the ashes of the Bush Administration's dismal forest management failures. As you know, by 1990 forest management in the Pacific Northwest had come to a grinding halt as a result of court injunctions spurred by the Bush Administration's flagrant violations of procedural and substantive environmental law.

Unfortunately, the closed-door process that generated the current Northwest forest plan (so-called "option nine") left many interests groups feeling excluded. The final product was a patchwork of older management schemes layered over one another, creating a system of reserves that on the one hand failed to protect many sensitive areas, and on the other included vast areas that were already roaded and logged. The species viability estimates that underpin the plan were based more on educated guesswork than on solid science. In the words of the scientific team that developed the plan, the viability rankings represented "degrees of belief in future outcomes," yet these qualitative assessments were the yardstick by which every management option was measured.

The ongoing controversies in the Pacific Northwest over roadless area entry and continued old growth logging make it clear the Northwest forest plan has failed to resolve the political and legal conflicts that led to its development. The President's proposed roadless area policy – which is expected to apply to forests governed by the Northwest forest plan – makes that abundantly clear.

I represent one of the congressional districts most affected by these policies. It is fair to say that over the years I have become a lay expert in forest management, as well as an experienced navigator in these troubled waters.

In December of 1992, just after the election and just before President Clinton was sworn into office, I began a series of discussions with representatives of some national and Northwest environmental groups on the one hand, and representatives of organized labor on the other. I proposed the two groups begin working with one another to see if an agreement was possible based on the following principles: (1) that all remaining old growth stands be protected, and (2) that lower intensity management (primarily uneven-aged stand management) be employed across much of the rest of the landscape, unless watershed, unsuitable soil or slope conditions, or other considerations made

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management activities inappropriate.

It was my hope the Clinton Administration would recognize the potential in this approach— both politically and biologically. However, the scientific team that developed the President's forest plan did not consider ANY alternative conforming to the one I proposed. In the end, the administration chose a very different approach— an approach that leaves many significant older forest stands and some roadless areas outside of reserves, while including within reserves extensive tracts of second growth lands previously roaded and managed.

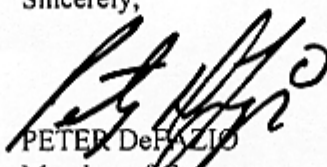
I believe the time has come to initiate a thorough administrative reassessment of the Northwest forest plan, with consideration given to a management program resembling the one I proposed nearly six years ago. The science upon which the plan was based should be reexamined. Land allocations should be reviewed to determine whether more protection is required for roadless and old growth areas left outside of reserves in the original plan. At the same time, already managed areas and extensive stands of second growth that were included within the plan's system of reserves and adaptive management areas should be evaluated to determine whether they can be returned to the matrix, where they may more properly belong. In addition, there is a crying need for a broad assessment of the forest road system's maintenance and repair backlogs, and an orderly process to begin retiring and eradicating unneeded roads.

There are many compelling reasons to consider an early plan reassessment. An incredible amount of scientific study has been undertaken since the Northwest forest plan was adopted. The Forest Service has completed detailed assessments of about 75 percent of the plan's late successional reserves. In the last three years, the agency has studied and assessed more than half of the watersheds in forests covered by the plan. Finally, we better understand the importance of connecting core reserve areas. Much of the scientific uncertainty that underlies the current plan could be reduced in a plan amendment process. What's more, the management agencies are already embarking on a plan amendment to address the legal failure of their survey and manage strategy. Finally, your roadless policy provides another compelling reason to rethink the Northwest forest plan.

The alternative to an orderly review of the current forest plan, with full public involvement, is continued political strife, the potential for renewed litigation and increasing public dissatisfaction with the administration's forest plan.

I hope to hear from you soon about my proposal.

Sincerely,



PETER DeFazio
Member of Congress

Cc: George Frampton, Chairman of Council on Environmental Quality
Mike Dombeck, Chief of the Forest Service
Tom Frye, Director of Bureau of Land Management